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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations, Wednesday, January 31, 1934.

Hello folks: How's the weather out your way? The sun is shining here in Washington today but we have had some real cold weather the past few days, hasn't looked very much like gardening, but the time is rolling along, day after tomorrow will be groundhog day and it will be spring almost before we know it. The seed catalogs have been arriving for the past four or five weeks and that's a sure sign that gardening season will soon be here. I'll venture that some of you folks who live in the southern part of the Cotton Belt already have your early potatoes, onion sets and English peas planted while those of us who live in the north are sitting around the fire between morning and evening chores, looking over the catalogs, and trying to decide what to plant in our gardens this spring.

I have a feeling that 1934 is going to be a banner year for farm gardens. The home dinner table is the one market that is seldom over-supplied, at least a full supply of good things to eat safely stored away in the cellar and pantry seems to create such a comfortable feeling that nobody is inclined to kick about it. Miss Van Deman will tell you that it is no trick for a good cook to prepare a nice dinner if there's a plenty of everything in the house to cook, but when the pantry and cellar are lean and you have a hungry family to feed, that's different.

As you folks know from my radio talks and newspaper articles, I'm a dyed-in-the-wool advocate of a full dinner table every day in the year.

That's where a good fruit and vegetable garden comes in with plenty of vegetables especially to supplement the milk, butter, eggs and home cured meats that should be a part of the homegrown supplies of every farm. I find myself envying you folks who live in the south and who can garden practically all the year. For the rest of us it is a question as to what we can do at this time of the year by way of getting ready for our spring gardening. If the weather permits we can haul a few loads of well rotted barnyard compost and spread it on the garden ready to plow under as soon as the frost is out and the ground dry enough to plow! Then there is the matter of getting a few early tomato and cabbage plants started, and some of you may want to make a hotbed for starting early plants.

Here at Washington we generally consider the tenth of May the safe date for setting out tomato and pepper plants. Now it requires about ten weeks to grow good tomato plants in the house or the hotbed and so it will not be a great while until we will be planting the seed indoors. I usually plan to sow tomato seed about the 22nd of February, Washington's Birthday. Old gardeners around Washington insist on planting potatoes on St. Patrick's day, March 17th, but there is a different set of planting dates for each section of the country. The main point is to be all set and ready to prepare the soil and plant your garden when the proper season does arrive.

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The question for us to determine now as we glance through the seed catalogs is, what vegetables to plant in our gardens this season. Most of us have our list pretty well worked out and we plant about the same ones year after year. Our selection depends very largely upon what the various members of the family prefer but there are certain standard vegetables that we can not afford to be without.

I mentioned potatoes, and most of us want plenty of potatoes, but seed potatoes are high in price this year. No doubt many of you have your own seed potatoes and if so I'd like to suggest that you go into your storage cellar now and pick out some of the medium to fair sized potatoes and put them away for planting, at least don't depend upon using the culls for planting. We need plenty of greens in our diet, especially in the early spring so I would suggest that turnip greens, mustard greens, spinach, kale and cabbage be among your early plantings. I would also like to urge you to plant a patch of asparagus, 20 to 30 hills for each member of the family that is large enough to make a full hand at the dinner table. Asparagus makes a fine vegetable for the early part of the season. It goes without saying that most of us will plant plenty of garden peas, English peas some of you call them, they can be planted as early as the ground can be worked. Then later we will be planting sweet corn, snap beans, lima beans, summer squashes and melons.

I haven't said anything about the root crops, the radishes, beets carrots, salsify, parsnips and turnips. These are among the most important of our vegetables and they take very little room in the garden. And don't neglect the salad crops, especially lettuce. Good head lettuce can be grown most everywhere if you get the plants started early and mature the heads before hot weather. There is a new strain of New York or Wonderful lettuce known as selection No. 12 that matures earlier than the regular New York. By the way, if any of you saved any garden seeds last season, or had any left over from last year, it would be a good idea to get them out of storage and look them over. If you are in doubt about any of them being good I'd advise you to test them. Get a shallow box that you can set on a table in the living room, fill it with sand or fine sifted soil then count out about fifty seeds from each lot and plant them in the box. Keep the soil moistened and fairly warm. In ten days or two weeks you will know whether the seeds are good or not. Testing your garden seeds is good indoor sport for winter days and it is mighty profitable. So long until next week.

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